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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines changes and developments in school library/media center programs around the world, emphasizing the problems faced by librarians and educators in developing countries, the efforts being made to establish school library services, the support which developed countries can give to these efforts, and the rise of national school library associations. (Author/ESR)

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SCHOOL MEDIA CENTERS AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

by

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SCHOOL MEDIA CENTERS AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

Abstract Changes and developments in school library/media center programs around the world. Special emphasis will be placed on efforts being made in developing countries, the support which developed countries can give and the rise of national school library associations.

In this short period of time I can only highlight some of the changes and developments in school library programs around the world and I do wish to share with you some slides showing school libraries in different countries.

Before looking at some of the specific school library programs, one should look at the overall problems which librarians and educators in many countries are facing. The competition for funds, whether local tax payer's or federal government's, is intense. Each tribal village, each state, each metropolitan system is intent upon acquiring its share of niara, dollars, yen, cedi, etc. for all the many needs facing the local government. Food, shelter, clothing, jobs come first; education and library programs often are forced to take a back seat, even though all the politicans and governments profess to believe that they are basic to the development of the country. The need to educate the citizens of any country in order that they may have jobs and produce material goods which will in turn assist the economy of a country is paramount. But it is the age old question, which comes first, production or education. How much basic book knowledge is necessary? Can a person be taught to do a job satisfactorily even though he cannot read? Of what value are books? How does a government implement a policy of universal education when the

population increases faster than the number of teachers, let alone the number of trained teachers?

The great efforts being many by many countries to leap into the 21st century are commendable and understandable. But the cost in many cases is almost prohibitive. For example, in Nigeria the concept of free primary education for all was promoted by the government in 1974. For the scheme to take off by September 1976, it was estimated that some 163,000 additional teachers must be trained for the estimated 2.3 million pupils who would be enrolled for the scheme of that time. Among the concerns stated by the Federal Authorities was the implication which the Universal Primary Education Act could have on library services. Libraries are needed, the concept accepted, but where to obtain personnel and materials raises an enormous problem. They are often regarded as a luxury not yet obtainable.

Parallel with the personnel problem in developing countries is the difficulty of obtaining books - text or trade. Where are they available in sufficient quantity to meet the reading needs of the children and young people? The question of the language to be used in the books presents a formidable question for many publishers. In Malaysia, for example, where Malay, English, Chinese, and Tamil (in that order of priority) are the official languages, how does a publisher decide what books should be printed, in which language and how many. Where can he find an author or translator who will do justice to the indigenous material? To say nothing of the effect of heat and dampness on the preservation of materials or the problem of importing books from other countries with the currency difficulties which are ever present.

We who live in the more industrialized countries can scarcely grasp the enormity of these problems. And we stand in awe at the progress that

is being made in many countries where teachers, Ministers of Education, and parents are determined that their children will have schools, will have access to reading materials.

Last week I had the opportunity to discuss the perspective in developing school library/media centers with Mrs. Ogunsheye (Ibadan, Nigeria) who is working with a group to develop a plan for an international seminar for school media leaders from developing countries. She has identified these problems specifically.

1) Conflict between oral traditional culture and the introduced book culture orientation.
2) Problem of availability of appropriate and relevant materials for learning whether in the collaquial language or in the adopted second language.
3) Problem of relevance of the educational system and the content of its curricula to ethnic orientations.
4) Absence of information on reading problems of children from developing countries.
5) Cost benefit considerations against other equally urgent development priorities of new nations – food, health, shelter in the face of population explosion and a largely non literate therefore less productive manpower.
6) Dearth of trained personnel for an inter disciplinary profession like school librarianship in face of acute shortage. Demands for librarians in other more highly considered institutions makes school library work less attractive so most centers that do exist are manned by a teacher with little if any library training and clerks who may have no more than primary level education.

A quick look at some of the programs and needs may help us understand better the current picture.

Africa; even in the cities, few children have any conception of the use and enjoyment of books. Folk material is particularly enjoyed - a distinct connection with the oral culture which still prevails.

Most African books are published in English though more effort is now being made to print in the vernacular. Little, for example, is published in Swahili, language of Kenya. West African publications have done more to correct this lack and many of those titles are to be found in East African countries since the local experiences are quite similar - even though the native languages differ. The emphasis is on making children aware of their immediate surrounding and then developing curiosity about the rest of the world.

A program for companies producing children's books in the area south of the Sahara has been promoted by Unesco. This is similar to the highly successful Asia program - the Tokyo Center for the Development of the Book in Asia. The aim of both centers is to publish large editions of texts in the languages of participating countries, prepared by authors of the region and complimented by illustrations from native artists. This effort is based on the premise that reading habits are developed at an early age and can determine the behavior of young adults. Such stories should arouse interests in international understanding as well. They are delightful books - a good addition to any college in any school library.

Nigeria and Ghana lead among the West African countries in the development of library service to schools, particularly at the secondary level. In Ghana, school library service is coordinated at the Central Library in Accra and a bookmobile carries current materials around to the regional centers. This remarkable program of selecting, processing, etc., has been carried on by a staff of three persons.

In Nigeria an increasing number of urban families are literate but the actual acquisition of reading materials for the home is seldom done. Generally, children in both rural and urban homes do not experience reading material until they enter school. The Universal Primary Education Act referred to earlier not only has impelled children into the school but has increased the problem of enough reading material. Too often it is a case of "read and pass on to the next person." There is, therefore, no reading tradition on which to build and little is available for older youth to read. Furthermore, this age group is more likely out in the streets and fields attempting to earn money rather than going on to the secondary schools and higher education programs. The national language in Nigeria is really a second language, English still being the common reading language, and there is little written material in the many vernaculars. However, experimental centers are being established and books in Yoruba, Ibo, etc. are being published which will encourage the expansion of indigenous books.

An outstanding program of school library service has been developed in Lagos State. This was started as a Pilot Project and included an education library for teachers, demonstration libraries for both primary and post-primary schools, centralized school library service, and training programs for teacher/librarians. This program has moved from the city of Lagos out into surrounding commenities. Today services to schools are being operated in most other states. An effective model demonstration media center is the Abadina School Library Resource established in Ibadan, operated by the Department of Library Studies, University of Ibadan. The Bendel State Library Board also operates an effective Book Depot for school and public libraries; one of the most efficient programs for

acquisition and dissemination of materials to librarians in the country. It also has cataloging service and mobile library program. It manages the whole library "Book Stock Fund" for all schools in the State.

Book resources are the most prevalent of material in most school libraries. AV media - cost and the problems associated with storage and maintence of equipment is a deterent. Research and development is needed here again particularly for relevant (indigenous) materials. Computer utilization is still an anathema in most school programs though not necessarily in the country.

No current statistics on size of book collections is available - at least reliable ones. They vary between 1500 in small new schools to 20,000+ in older, primarily secondary, often private schools. Very few elementary/primary school libraries exist. For example in Malaysia they may range from the tiny rural school where the children speak Tamil (the fourth language in usage) to the well organized secondary school in Kuala Lumpur where Malay, English and possible Chinese books are available in reasonable quantity.

One of the emerging problems or perhaps I should say concerns is one that we have been troubled by for many years - the great need to train teachers in the use of the library so that they will be supportive of the program, competent and intelligent in making use of the resources with their children. This is truly an international dilemma.

The development of school library associations, either independent or a part of the national library association, is evidence of the concern which is arising re media center program. When IASL printed its first Directory of National School Library Associations, 22 countries were represented. The current edition lists 30 countries with 38 associations

plus three others having an official contact person within a general association. The Nordic regional (six countries combined in addition to their own associations) is a recent effort. Many of these associations have regular publications. The majority have developed during the last two decades. National manuals and guidelines are resulting. In addition the Unesco guideline for School Library Media Centers by two U.S. authors (Beilke & Carrol) is also available in Spanish and French. (IASL publication of national Manuals - annotated is now available.)[1]

Two international groups, IASL and the School Library Section IFLA, coordinate their activities and have liaison representatives on their boards. They relate to education and library associations at the international level. IASL relates to national and provinces/state associations and the latest edition of its Association Assembly Newsletter contains interesting information on the programs which are being carried out by associations in other countries. Did you know for instance that there is a burgeoning French Canadian group beside the Canadian School Library Association? There are also strong provincial associations.

Although Hong Kong has no formal association, there is an informal banding together which has resulted in great activity this year with plans for a regular expansion of school library. The government has doubled funding in secondary schools to $20 per pupil and is concerned about the library shortage in primary schools. There is a plan for developing class libraries which will lead into expanded service. In 1983 grades 5 and 6 will be supported, in '84 grades 3 and 4 and '85 grades 1 and 2. There will be $10 per pupil. An in-service training

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[1] Dr. Judith Higgins, compiler/editor, Getting Started: A Bibliography of Ideas and Procedures for School Library Media Centers. IASL, School of Library & Information Science, WMU, Kalamazoo, MI 49008.

course in the secondary sector is a regular feature and a ten session program for primary teachers is planned for October 1983. Workshops for classroom teachers in how to relate to this subject were held. Plans to organize a School Library Association are underway.

Jamaica Library Association, School Section is undertaking several projects on its own (1) a survey of school library training, qualifications, budgets, etc. to determine standards. The government has accepted standards "in principle" and the JLA working party has sent a report on the survey and a delegation to the Ministry of Education. (2) To celebrate their 10th year, the schools section hopes to mount a Caribbean conference workshop.

Zimbabwe School Library, section of ZLA has the status of a branch and is six years old. Courses are available for teachers. Funding is received from ZLA and an annual grant from the Ministry of Education and Culture. They held their fifth course in '81 - a great success. The School must be a member of the school library section to participate. They have a 100+ members; hold regular meetings, are pushing for indigenous authors and publications, and have started a Newsletter. Current efforts are taking the form of negotiating for introduction of a library post in every secondary school (non professional but full-time). National library and documentation services will include a training program. School population has increased at least five times with no increase in funding. There is some hope for a component in the teacher training program on the role of the school library.

One of the most active associations is the School Library Association in the United Kingdom. The Association publishes a quarterly journal, "The School Librarian." This is one of the benefits of membership but the

journal also goes on subscription to every part of the world. A quarterly news-sheet, "Miscellany" accompanies members' copies of the journal. The publishing programme also includes annotated booklists. One recently published, "A Choice of Stories" by Jill Bennett, is selling remarkably well. A guidelines series includes "Routines: managing a small school library" and "Audiocassettes: a guide to selection and management."

There is a real need among U.S. school librarians to broaden our perspective of what is happening at the international level. We can learn from them. We can share with them. They develop unique ways of promoting servides such as the Banco de Libro in Venezuela, of working with bilingual problems - as in Papua/New Guinea or with the Australian "outback" Aborigines, of sending materials to out of the way areas (by boatmobiles, canoes/planes) and coordinating services to children and young people. The transfer of knowledge and application in new situations is a trademark of librarianship from which all benefit.

The opportunities of sharing are varied. One of the most significant is the Unesco Gift Coupon program "Books for School Libraries in the Developing Countries" which IASL sponsors. This is an opportunity to help meet the reading thirst of the young generation. Contributions to Project UCA/554- Books and Libraries should be mailed to Lucille C. Thomas, Coordinator, IASL/Unesco gift coupon program, 1184 Union St., Brooklyn, New York 11225. Youngsters in U.S. schools enjoy participating in this project.

In addition you can become active in international associations and activities. IASL, for example, provides you with a quarterly Newsletter, proceedings of its annual conferences which include papers on activities in many countries, and several special publications. Being active internationally gives you opportunities to know people from other

lands, presents you with ways to encourage your teachers and students to become acquainted with overseas students thru pen pals, book (tape) clubs etc. It presents unique opportunities for you to travel abroad and form new friendships.

(Slides shown here)

In conclusion, may I just say that understanding comes thru knowledge and personal involvement and at the international level this is particularly important. We have both a responsibility and an opportunity thru our work to help our students better understand people in other parts of the world and we have ourselves the opportunity to become involved, to learn about colleagues in other countries, to, in a small way, help in the cause of international peace (world understanding).